Correctional Management of Security Risk Groups: A Case Study

by
Divya Sharma, Ph.D. and Kim Marino, Ph.D.

Abstract

This study evaluates the Youth Development Unit (YDU) program at Garner Correctional Institution located in Newtown, Connecticut. The YDU is designed to rehabilitate and educate young males (18-21 years), who are Security Risk Group (SRG) affiliated, through education and social learning. The participants move through five phases of the YDU program that have specific restrictions, conditions and incentives. At the start of this study, there were 12 participants in the program, while 19 others had completed it since it was started in 2013. The primary data were collected from educational and custodial staff. By the time this paper was being written, Phases 2 through 5 of the YDU were moved to another location and only Phase 1 remained at Garner. The name of the YDU was also changed to the Mandated Education Unit (MEU). Given the small sample size and gaps in the data, it is unreasonable to draw too many broad conclusions and generalizations, but despite these limitations, this study provides useful insights about the program and the people involved. As MEU programs in Connecticut have the same objectives, this evaluation could serve as a foundation for future research. To do so, it is imperative to identify variables of importance and keep systematic (readily available and accessible) data, update information on each participant, and analyze the data over a period of time.

Introduction

This study evaluates the Youth Development Unit (YDU) program at Garner Correctional Institution located in Newtown, Connecticut. The inmates accepted into the YDU are held in "close custody" in a specialized housing unit where they are segregated from the general prison population. The program has two main goals, namely, gang renunciation and education and integrates elements of reform and rehabilitation through modification in social learning and interactions. This evaluation focuses on the average time of progression from Phase 1 to Phase 5, participant background characteristics, and post release outcomes. It explores behavioral and academic challenges from the perspectives of custodial and educational staff. The findings also highlight the importance of emotional and psychological restructuring being integral to academic motivation, especially behind bars.

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

The Youth Development Unit - An Overview

YDU participants are assigned a security risk group (SRG) score (1-4) which determines their initial placement in the five phase program. The SRG score is reduced as the inmate advances through the five phases, participating in both the SRG and education programming. During any phase, a participant who fails to participate in the required programming or violates unit rules may be regressed to a prior phase. Participants are also assigned an Education Score (1-4) based on their highest level of education. Most, if not all of the YDU participants do not have a high school diploma or GED and are scored as a 4.

There is a clear incentive for inmates to participate in YDU. Inmates who are classified as SRG are generally placed in administrative segregation. As an alternative, successful YDU participants can eventually do their time in the general prison population with significantly less restrictions. This opportunity does require them to sign a Letter of Intent stating that they intend to participate in the YDU program and renounce their gang affiliation.

YDU participants can enter at Phase 1, 2, or 3, depending on what they did to get designated as a SRG member. Phase 1 participants are on lockdown 23 hours per day and are on restraint status for out of cell movement**.** They are permitted two noncontact visits per week with immediate family and are required to eat all of their meals in their cell. Participants spend the first 30 days learning about the program and working on basic communication skills. All students, including phase 1 are provided access to a minimum of 15 hours of education per week. School in the morning was from 8:00-10:30 and afternoon 1:00 -3:00. The SRG programming occurs in the individual's housing cell and includes programming entitled, "Getting Settled & Getting Going" and "Handling a Crisis". These programs are designed to introduce the YDU participants to the requirements and expectations of the Youth Development Unit and provide them with the skills to address the possible conflicts that may arise during their incarceration. Participants can advance to the next phase by successfully completing the Security Risk Group curriculum and avoiding any disciplinary reports.

Phase 2 participants are double celled. This is a critical stage in the program because participants may be required to share a cell with a rival gang member. At this phase, participants are removed from restraint status. Participants in Phases 2 through 5 are grouped into squads and complete all activities together, including meals, recreation, and programs. The SRG programming required during Phase 2 includes, "Anger Management" and "Consequences & Choices". These programs help participants identify the similarities and commonalities among their peers and encourage them to understand the decision making behind their behaviors. Phase 3 participants have increased recreational privileges and engage in programming focused on cognitive restructuring and conflict resolution. The two programs, "Unlocking your thinking, attitude, behavior and choices" & "Building the ladder", encourage self-reflection and planning for the future. Participants are asked to reflect on what they want to do with their lives once they have completed their sentence. At

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

this phase, the SRG score is reduced. Phase 4 privileges include visits from non-immediate family members. The SRG programs at this phase include: "How to deal with your problems" & "How to do your bid". "Bid" refers to prison time" and these programs guide participants on what they can do to help them get through their sentence.

In Phase 5, participants must complete two programs, "Relapse Prevention" & "Bridge Group". Here**,** they discuss how to avoid being sent back to prison and how to prepare for the transition to the general prison population. Participants may be considered for renunciation after a minimum of 270 consecutive days in the program and the successful completion of both the SRG and education programs. If approved for designation removal, the SRG score will be reduced and the inmate will be transferred to the general prison population.

Brief Literature Review

Gang renunciation programs are rare in prison. According to the 2012 NGCRC National Gang/STG Survey, 85.5 percent (N = 124 prisons, across 41 states) of survey respondents did not have a gang renunciation program (Knox, 2012). With an increase in the incarceration rates for gang members in correctional facilities (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010), management of security risk groups through maximum security supervision and structured programming has become a critical issue in the field of corrections (Kowalski & Martin, 2012). Security risk groups pose a significant threat to correctional staff, other inmates, and the general function of the correctional facility (Arthur, 2009). Research indicates that gang containment approaches vary by jurisdiction. Several states have experimented with isolating gang members in speci c units or facilities to minimize their in uence (Fischer, 2001; Hill, 2009; U.S. Department of Justice, 1992 as cited in 2010, Winterdyk & Ruddell). The segregation of security risk groups from the general correctional population many contain the risk of physical threats and recruitment practices, but it fails to encourage the social skills necessary for successful re-entry (Baykan, 2008; Worrall & Morris, 2012).

The "lock-em up" mentality provides only a temporary solution to the problem and has no long term positive effect on recidivism rates. Isolation-based strategies generally do not provide inmates with any form of "step-down" housing assignments so inmates are returned directly to the community without any reinforcement of positive social and interpersonal skills (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010; Kowalski & Martin, 2012). A recent meta-analysis, revealed that most gang management strategies are suppression oriented and few correctional facilities use rehabilitative resources to encourage gang renunciation (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). The CDC is one of the few facilities to take this approach. The YDU was created as a response to the increasing presence of gangs in the CDC system which led to an increase in prison violence. This program was designed through a collaborative multi-disciplinary initiative involving corrections, mental health, and education. The program leads security risk group members through a structured, program based model in order to encourage renouncement of their gang affiliation. The phase progression in the

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

program begins with segregation, but unlike many other facilities, ends with placement into general population and finally reintegration into the community. Research shows that traditional policies of segregating inmates without program intervention have not proven successful in reducing violent behavior within the prison system. (Trulson, Marquart & Kawucha, 2006; Maghan, 2000).

It is important that correctional programs also address the negative self-images that many of these young offenders have adopted over the course of their lifetime. The labels that have been attached to many of these offenders, either from the legal system, their communities, schools and/or even their own families, are inevitably connected to their behaviors. Some studies (Mahoney, 1974; Wellford, 1975) have argued that labeling has had limited empirical and theoretical support though it has provided some important insight about internalization of negative labels (Matsueda, 1992). It occurs even if those labels come from social forces (Becker, 1963; Braithwaite, 1989) rather than the criminal justice system itself. In order to promote change, the stigmatization associated with these labels must be replaced with reinforcements that promote a more positive self- image.

It is important also to acknowledge the influence of social learning on gang related behavior. Social learning theory views deviant and miscreant behavior as a result of learned definitions and social reinforcements through interaction (Akers, 1985, 1992) and observation of a human model (Bandura, 1974). Many of these young offenders grew up in high crime areas that are plagued with drugs, gangs, and gun violence. Their neighborhoods provided a teaching ground for gang violence and reinforced an allegiance to the street above the need and desire for education. One has to keep in mind that cultural and subcultural factors would impact the positive or negative connotation assigned to the act and outcome, and could validate learning a number of behaviors ranging from creativity to aggression (Bandura, 1965; Zimmerman & Dialessi, 1973). In gang ridden communities, youth are continually exposed to gang culture which increases the risk of their own future involvement. Therefore, punishment alone may not be effective in promoting prosocial behavior (Solomon, 1964) or helping gang members to unlearn behavior that has been conditioned, and even rewarded in a subcultural context. In order to change behavior, it is necessary to bring about change in the surrounding environment (Sellers & Winfree, 1990). From a policy perspective, it entails unlearning deviant actions and reactions and learning new behaviors and coping mechanisms. The correctional system plays an important role in reconfiguring the environmental factors and the individual's interaction with them. This leads us to the implementation of education programs in a correctional setting.

The most valuable intervention for inmates is educational programming which assists inmates in obtaining their high school diploma or G.E.D. (Esperian, 2010; Nuttall, Hollmen, & Staley, 2003; Vacca, 2004). Recent research supports the premise that receiving correctional education while incarcerated reduces an individual's risk of recidivating after release ("Employment, wages and public," 2007). In fact, inmates who participated in high school/ GED programs had 30 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who had not (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders & Miles, 2013). More specifically,

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Nuttall (2003) reports that inmates younger than 21 who earned a GED were 14 percent less likely to return to prison within three years. This is especially critical for lower income, minority males who are more likely to be incarcerated (Western, 2006) at a younger age and likely to have lower pre-prison educational qualifications (Tewksbury & Stengel, 2006; Erisman & Contardo, 2005). Studies show that education helps in reducing recidivism, potentially increasing job opportunities and also increases public safety (Chappell, 2004; Steurer& Smith, 2003).

The data from the CDC show that violence has decreased significantly in both the general prison population and high-risk units since it implemented the Closed Custody program for security risk groups. Serious assaults decreased from 233 in 1993 (the year before the Close Custody Gang Management Program was launched), to 129 in 2001 (Austin & McGinnis, 2004). Best practices in correctional supervision require current research on program implementation and practice and this program evaluation of the YDU is a step in that direction.

Research Methodology

Before starting data collection, both researchers went through mandatory security training at Garner Correctional Institution in Newtown, CT. The training was required in order for researchers to make multiple trips to the facility to conduct interviews. In addition to the visits for the data collection, the researchers took two tours of the facility. The first tour was scheduled before any data were collected. The second tour of the facility took place after preliminary interviews with custodial and educational staff. The second tour afforded a better understanding of the spatial layout of the unit, especially classrooms, therapeutic cubicles, and the recreational yard. The post interview visit also prompted follow-up questions relative to program management.

The study employs a non-probability method of judgment sampling. The respondents were purposively selected due to their unique position in the correctional population that affords them access to the relevant information. The use of a non-probability sampling method, small sample size, and gaps in the available data make it unreasonable to draw too many broad conclusions and generalizations about the program. Instead, it can be treated as a survey of the program on which future evaluations can be conducted as Mandated Education Unit[1] programs in Connecticut have the same objectives. It would also provide useful insights about the program and the people involved.

The majority of research questions were open ended and elicited through a semi-structured interview style. Follow-up questions were asked either in person or by email. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through interviews with members of custodial (5) and educational staff (2).

The study uses both qualitative and quantitative data from secondary sources including CDC program manuals, administrative directives, and information on the subjects who have completed the YDU program and/or are currently in the program. Based on the program description, information was sought on a number of variables including, SRG score

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

of the individual as he starts the program, progression to the next level or not, time taken to progress from each phase to the next, education score when admitted to the program, age when admitted to the program, race, documented learning disability (yes or no), prior conviction (yes or no), prior incarceration (yes or no), prior participation in the YDU program, reason for non-completion, first or primary language, mental health evaluation outcome (only yes or no- that is, whether the subject suffers from a mental illness or not), gang affiliation, and number and type (immediate or non-immediate) of family visitations. During preliminary interviews, questions were also asked about the reasons for regression between phases.

As it is the first formal evaluation of the program, efforts were made to ask open ended questions and gather as much information as possible. Although this resulted in significantly more qualitative data, it is nonetheless critical in understanding the larger context of the program. However, researchers ensured that the questions did not focus on descriptive information only and asked questions that provided insights into explanatory and evaluative aspects of the program, including reasons for regression, behavioral issues inside the classroom, interaction between custodial and educational staff, available resources or lack thereof, etc.

At the time of data collection, the YDU at Garner had 12 inmates. The data were also sought about the inmates who have completed the program. That data is housed at the Connecticut Department of Correction at Wethersfield, CT. It is kept in a log book and organized by the specific facility (i.e., Garner, Northern, etc.). Researchers did not have access to subject case files and the data were provided by the custodial staff in excel files, carefully excluding personal information on the subjects. The excel files which contained the variables mentioned earlier were emailed to the researchers and included information on 19 additional inmates. That increased the sample size to 31. However, there were a number of gaps in available data that will be addressed in the section on data and findings.

During interviews, custodial staff referred to the individuals in the program as inmates, while educational staff referred to them as students. While presenting findings, both terms have been used along with the term participants. The term respondent refers to the members of custodial and educational staff who were interviewed.

Data

Data was collected on 31 respondents that included 12 current and 19 past participants of the YDU program at Garner. Of the 19 past participants, 2 were placed in Phase 1 with SRG scores of 4, and the remaining 17 were placed in Phase 3 with SRG scores of 3. In this sample, 18 of the 19 participants had education scores of 3 and 4, indicating that they did not have a GED or high school diploma.

As mentioned earlier, the YDU program is designed to rehabilitate and educate males, 18-21 years of age. As expected, the majority of participants in the program are within this age group. However, the respondents noted that some individuals that could be aging out may be allowed to stay back if they were close to getting their GEDs. It should

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

be noted that two inmates were 22 and 23 years old respectively and were allowed to enter the program because they were already enrolled in a correctional GED program before they were transferred to Garner**.**

For descriptive purposes, the sample of 31 participants included 16 African Americans, 14 Latinos, and 1 Caucasian. Prior convictions were found for 7 participants and 11 had been previously incarcerated. The difference in prior conviction and prior incarceration data is due to issues such as pretrial detention or sealed juvenile convictions. Out of 31 participants, only 1 had prior participation in the YDU, but did not complete it the first time around as he was transferred to another correctional facility after being involved in a fight. Of the current participants, 8 indicated that English was their first language, while 4 listed Spanish as a first language. There were no data available about the first language of the 19 prior participants who had already completed the program.

Information was sought on mental health evaluation and outcome. That is, whether participants went through a mental health evaluation and if any of the participants had mental health problems. Due to confidentiality issues, information on the type of mental illness was not sought. It was noted that all YDU participants undergo mental health evaluations. There were no data available on mental health outcome for the participants who had already completed the program, but among the 12 currently in the program, only 2 did not have any documented mental health issues.

Participants belonged to a wide range of gangs including Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, Solidos, Ñeta, MS13, and Gangster Disciples[2]. According to survey findings (2015), the Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, and Gangster Disciples rank as the most commonly reported gangs within state facilities (National Gang Report, 2015). These gangs are known to have a strong presence in prisons throughout Connecticut. The Latin Kings are the oldest and largest Hispanic street gang and have been around since the 1930's (**"Latin** Kings"). Their rivals, Solidos, otherwise known as Los Solidos, also a Hispanic gang, was founded in Hartford, CT in the early 1990's ("Los Solidos Nations"). Neta is a street gang originally from Puerto Rico that has also infiltrated Connecticut and is yet another rival of the Latin Kings ("NETAS - La Associacion Ñetas").

Given the body of research on family connections, reform, rehabilitation, and recidivism, it was deemed relevant to gather data on the number and type of family visits. There were no data available on the number of visits for the 19 participants who had completed the program so there was no way to evaluate the relationship between program success and community ties. Among those currently in the program, one participant had 1 family visit, a second had 12 family visits, and a third had 14 family visits. There were 9 participants who either did not have any family visits or there were no data available on it. All 19 participants who have completed the program had visits from immediate family members (though the number of visits is not known). The identification of the visitor and their relationship to the inmate is reported to the correctional facility both at the time of the request for visitation and when the family member reports for the scheduled visit. As per the program description, non-immediate family visits are only permitted in Phase 4. The Department of

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Corrections requires all inmates, not just YDU participants, to submit a proposed visitor list which must be approved before any visits are permitted. The visitor requests includes the name of the individual, address, social security number and the relationship to the inmate. This vetting process is used to control the visitation process so that those with a criminal record and/or suspected or known gang members are removed from the inmate's approved visitation list.

One of the main topics of interest was to study the phase progression. That is, the amount of time taken in each phase, reasons for regression, and overall time taken to complete the YDU program. There were very limited data available on the progression through the phases of the program by the current 12 participants. There was no information available on the 19 participants who had already completed the program, except that 2 of them were re-designated as gang members. Once a participant completes the program, he is released into the general prison population. It is during this time that the two participants were found to be re-affiliated with gangs and as a result, re-designated. One of the participants was re-designated eighty days after completing the YDU program, and the second one was re-designated nearly eight months after completion.

At the time of the data collection, there were 4 participants in Phase 1, 2 in Phase 2, 5 in Phase 3, and 1 in Phase 4. There was 1 respondent who noted that all inmates were placed in Phase 1 at the start unless they transferred from another program, but other respondents noted that participants could be placed in any phase. After the follow up interviews, it was clarified that indeed inmates could be placed in any phase, but that they were initially placed in Phase 1, as they were yet to be evaluated.

Very limited data were available on how much time each participant took between phases. As per the program description, the minimum time taken in each phase varies for participants classified as Class A, B and C. As per the available data, 5 out of the 12 participants currently in the program had regressed at various stages. The data showed that 2 out of those 5 participants regressed twice, once to Phase 1 and once to Phase 2. Only 1 participant regressed multiple phases in a single instance and was moved from Phase 3 back to Phase 1.

Classroom Space and Structure

Researchers took two tours of the Garner Correctional Institution to get a sense of the physical layout of the housing cells, therapeutic cubicles, recreational area, and classrooms. Education classes are run from Monday to Friday in the morning from 8:30 am to 10:30 am, and in the afternoon from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. The attendance was better in the afternoon session.

Classes were usually small and had 6 to 8 students at a time. Based on the ability level, at times there may only be 2 to 3 students in a classroom. It was noted that the small class size was beneficial as it presented minimal behavioral challenges. The main classroom has desks, chairs, computers, smartboard, whiteboard and books. As expected, there is no access to the Internet. Educators wear body alarms and one officer is stationed outside

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

the classroom with a clear view of activities in the class.

There are four separate therapeutic cubicles used for the education programming for Phase 1 participants. At any given time, there are two officers on the floor when there are students in therapeutic cubicles. The unit team had three members including a Captain, Counselor, and Correctional Treatment Officer. The unit team is now down to two members including a Captain and Counselor. At the time of the data collection, there were two educators, but one of them has since been transferred. There is also one school psychologist. At Garner, the correctional officers work in three shifts. The first day shift is from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, the second day shift is from 4:00 pm to 12:00 am, and the third shift is from 12:00 am to 8:00 am. Five officers are assigned to day shifts and two officers are assigned to the night shift. By the time this paper was being written, the number of officers in days shifts had been reduced to four. Overall, staffing was not presented as an issue since the number of participants in the YDU program was relatively low at only 12 inmates.

Discussion

This discussion is based on interviews conducted with the custodial staff and educational staff. The YDU program was created at Garner to address inmates who were identified as gang members. Technically, YDU participants are not youth. They are all adults between the ages of 18 to 21. Earlier there was a gang management program at Garner, but the YDU program, which included five phases and a mandatory education component, was started in 2013. Specialized housing was provided at Garner as Mason Youth Institution (MYI) in Cheshire, CT, could no longer accommodate them. The previous program classified inmates as gang members and threat members. Gang members were usually the "soldiers" in a gang and not engaged in violent activities, while the threat members were leaders and engaged in violent activities. One respondent who was familiar with both the programs noted that compared to the previous program, YDU is much smaller and easier to manage. The YDU is capped at 24, making it easy to set rules, make visible changes, and observe individual behavior. A respondent noted that in case of overflow, the inmates would wait in restrictive housing, but that it had not been a problem. One time that a couple of inmates had to wait, it only took a few days to accommodate them in the YDU program. Another respondent closely involved with developing the YDU program noted that there used to be more Latin King and Elm City Boys (mix of New Haven based gangs), but now there are more Bloods and Crips. Gang members are also much younger now than before.

The primary function of YDU is education. The goal of gang renunciation is equally important, which is achieved when an inmate formally relinquishes their title and association with their identified gang. The respondents admitted that there was no real way of knowing whether the goal was achieved unless the participant reoffended and was re-designated as a gang member. Recidivism is measured based on the reoffending of those who complete the YDU program and are moved to the general prison population. There was no way to keep track of them once they were released from prison unless they reoffended and returned to the same facility. It may create an impression that the real goal is to modify YDU

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

participant behavior in the short term and not stop gang activity in the long term. However, all respondents stressed the importance of fundamentally changing habits. That is, even if the inmate was not tracked after being released from prison, the expectation is that the YDU program would have instilled long term change. In the limited data that are available, out of the 19 who have completed the program, only 2 were re-designated.

According to one respondent, getting back to the general prison population may be a greater incentive for the inmates than getting their GEDs. He did not think that there was any certain way of telling whether inmates actually denounced their gang membership or not, (this could be defined as not using gang signs or symbols or continuing to follow the gang code) but that they would stay clean to have their SRG tag removed. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, all those involved in the program hoped that over time through behavior modification, these participants would change for good.

As previously mentioned, when brought into the YDU program, inmates could be placed in any phase. As per the available data, the majority of them were placed in Phase 3. During the program, participants could regress to lower phases. In these cases, they are given the opportunity to appeal their regression to the Team Unit and Warden.

In a program that strongly focuses on education, it was important to recognize that many of the participants had special education needs. For those inmates who were identified as having special education needs, educators developed individualized education programs, otherwise known as IEPs, in which individual academic and behavior goals were noted. Transitional and employment goals were also put in place for individual students. Educators met 2 to 3 times per week to discuss how students were progressing in class. They also observed students in classrooms.

In Phase 1, participants were housed in individual cells and individually got one hour in the yard per day. One respondent noted that Phase 1 was the most challenging as students had a number of emotional and psychological barriers. Participants were placed in therapeutic cubicles for the education component that presented, though necessary, a physical barrier to direct interaction. Another respondent observed that most inmates were not mature enough to understand the value of education. They liked to maintain a façade of toughness and had 'disdain for authority.' He added that the first challenge was getting inmates to comply with requests and rules as they generally lacked structure and had disrespect for authority. Another respondent noted that inmates were generally resistant to being disciplined and may hold a grudge against officers or staff who tried to discipline them. In the early phases, it was very rare for participants to take responsibility and most of them just wanted to sleep in their cells. The respondents noted that older gang members (over the age of 30) who are tired of gang life may value education more than the younger ones that YDU caters to.

Multiple respondents noted that most students in the program had grown up with negative self-perceptions and labels and saw themselves as failures. It was noted that any small success could potentially work as an incentive for them to keep trying. According to one respondent, most students entering the program valued street life over education. They

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

had been labeled "stupid" and throughout their life have internalized negative self-identities. Some students did come from "good families," but seemed to have gotten caught up in criminal way of life. One respondent noted that interestingly, Latin Kings seem to value education.

One of the respondents emphasized the importance of emotional and psychological restructuring being integral to academic motivation, especially behind bars. That is, these students had to unlearn certain negative behaviors and attitudes and replace them with something constructive and positive. Most students in this environment did not have the mindset to work hard and succeed, but gradually through incentives and small successes, seeds were planted. Respondents noted that as students "phased up", meaning they advanced to the next program phase, for example from Phase 2 to Phase 3, they started to build rapport with each other, but even then, it remained challenging to keep them motivated through incentives. Attendance was the most obvious and earliest sign of how the students were doing in the program. It was usually weak in the initial phase and at times dropped in Phase 2 as well. It was noted that attendance and motivation often dropped when students built too many sanctions.

To address it, the school psychologist had developed a reflection sheet called the Incentive Tracking Sheet (See Appendix II) aimed at showing students what they had done to get a particular score or sanction. It conveyed to students that the score was a direct consequence of their actions. The goal was to help students reflect on their own behavior. Research has shown that self-reflection promotes positive behavior modification (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

Students were also encouraged to tell something positive about classmates as it is hoped that it would make them feel invested in their success. Respondents noted that though it was difficult to encourage students, continuous encouragement did eventually work. There had been some remarkable success stories. For example, one student had an initial attendance rate of 30 percent, but with due encouragement, he increased it to a 90 percent attendance rate. Most students were able to maintain an attendance rate of 70 percent to 75 percent. In Phase 1, if a student was on good behavior for 6-8 weeks, the school psychologist would take his picture, get it printed and the student could send it to his family. After the budget cuts however, the staff member who was providing the pictures was let go and this incentive is no longer available. This was one of the few negative effects that were found relative to the issue of low staffing. Students could also make something (such as a handmade card) for their family members and send it home for the holidays. Students needed to have a 95 percent attendance rate to avail of these incentives. It should be noted that counseling was provided for students' emotional and social needs through all phases of the program.

The information collected through interviews shows that the attendance and academic performance in Phase 2 were better than in Phase 1. The motivation level of participants seemed to increase as they progressed through the phases. This may be a response to the increase in privileges and incentives which build with progression into each

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

subsequent phase.

During interviews it was anecdotally shared that most participants regressed for reasons such as being in possession of gang related imagery or text. It was reported that generally there was no fighting among students in the classroom, and in the past two years, there has been only one planned altercation. However, one respondent noted that the most common reason for regression seemed to be fighting occurring within the unit between inmates. If two individuals were involved in a fight, it did not matter who initiated it and both faced disciplinary consequences. Two of the respondents also noted that there had been incidents where fights had been initiated on inmates who were close to completing the program and moving to general population. In these cases, other participants out of jealousy put them in situations that threatened their transfer to the general prison population. Phase regression had also been the result of attacks on custodial staff and indecent exposure by inmates in the unit.

According to one respondent, in Phase 2 where inmates share cells, there were predator related concerns because of cohabitation of rival gang members. As noted earlier, in Phases 2 to 5, students are educated in a group. It is argued that the presence of security staff may create a negative perception of an education setting, so security staff is stationed outside of the classroom. Given the obvious security concern, the officer is stationed in a position where he has a clear view of the interior of the classroom. Respondents noted that generally students viewed security or custodial staff as punitive and teaching and counseling staff as someone who was helping them.

A member of the educational staff noted that some of the factors that affected student's morale and performance were court dates, sentence length, death of a family member, or if a family member did not visit. Students may be pulled out of a class for a day or two while they processed such occurrences and dealt with their emotions. They were provided counseling and were given the opportunity to utilize the counseling room as a "safe zone" where they would feel free to express their emotions, whether it be to 'talk, vent, or cry.'

A member of the custodial staff stated that it was unclear if visitors were important to YDU inmates and that he had not made such an observation. He noted that more than anything else, inmates wanted to remove the SRG label, and that was their strongest motivation to continue with the program. The slight difference of opinion here may be due the fact that the YDU participants shared more emotional or family related information with the educational staff than with the custodial staff. On the other hand, data also revealed that only 3 out of the current 12 participants had any visits from family members. Another respondent added that other privileges such as visiting the library may be more meaningful than family visits, adding that visits may make more of a difference for inmates who had kids or close family members.

Sometimes students, typically those preparing to take the GED, asked to take homework back to their cells, while others generally complete their work in the classroom. It was noted that students were allowed to keep pencils to complete their work, but had to purchase their own. Focused attention was given to those who were preparing to take their

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

GEDs. Following the regular class time, these students would be given 30 to 60 additional minutes for intensive GED preparation including practice questions. During this time, their strengths and weaknesses were identified and worked on. It should be noted that the GEDs are administered electronically and are timed, just as they would be for any GED applicant. Since 2015 (start of this study), 3 participants had earned their GEDs and all of them passed in their first attempt.

The data on how many participants in the YDU have earned their GEDs was not readily available. This lack of available information was disappointing considering the importance the YDU program places on the education component. During interviews it was revealed that most of them did not get their GEDs while in the program, but received extensive preparation for the same. These students were able to take the GED test later after being transferred to the general prison population.

YDU participants receive transitional services even after getting their GEDs. They meet with the school psychologist for about 2 hours per month and get help with resume writing and job search skills. They are given access to books, such as "Best Low Stress Jobs", "Jobs without a Four Year Degree", and "Best Jobs for Introverts". They even participate in mock job interviews with the educational staff. The program also provides reentry counseling to help them transition to the general population. They are provided assistance in how to improve time management and are taught social skills which include non-violent decision making and coping mechanisms. They are shown a 2007 video documentary entitled, "From Prison to Home," which tracks the challenges of four African American males throughout their first year of release from prison. This video helps to prepare YDU participants for the challenges that they too are likely to face upon re-entry. At the end of the program, they are given multiple copies of their resume and a list of resources in the community to increase their chance of successful re-entry.

Dynamic between Custodial and Educational Staff

All respondents had a positive view of the YDU program which balances demerits with incentives. Despite only small successes, the morale of the staff is high. There is also good collaboration between custodial and educational staff. The educational staff goes through the same training as correctional officers. The discretion piece is critical to the program's success as officers can use incentives as carrots to enforce positive behavioral change. Eventually behavior becomes habit and some of the participants continue with these habits even after they have been moved to general population.

Respondents noted that at Northern, there seems to be more separation between custodial and educational staff, but at Garner, the staff work well together despite differences in their role orientation. At this facility, the coordination seems to be better and they share a good rapport. Some of the staff members have been at Garner for more than 20 years. There is mutual respect and good rapport among various stakeholders. It may not be so in other facilities, but at Garner, everyone is on the same page. All respondents in various roles and positions echoed the same sentiment.

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Small Successes

As part of the program, educational staff conducts exit interviews with students to explore what else could have been done, what went well, what they learned, etc. The custodial and educational staff members temper their expectations and look for small successes. These include students being more respectful, nicer to each other, and generally exhibiting positive social behaviors.

As a respondent noted, one cannot expect inmates to make sweeping changes very fast, but smaller changes, such as making their beds could be taken as a sign of improvement. Inmates are required to make their beds in the morning which are inspected daily. This may seem like an insignificant rule, but it helps to teach them to follow rules. Some of the inmates continue to make their beds even after being transferred to general prison population and take pride in it. This would reflect positive learning and the adoption of normative structure. Both educational and custodial staff agreed that while some inmates get others into trouble, some actually instill motivation and encourage peer success in the program. This also is viewed as a sign of success.

The respondents were asked what changes they would like to see in the program, and what information they would like to know about the program itself. A member of the custodial staff said that he would like to see more group projects as it is the best way to observe behavioral change. It also helps reinforce positive social interaction and assists in the development of communication and social skills. However, due to time and budget (personnel) constraints, it is not possible to do so. One respondent believed that the educational staff should have more security training. Multiple respondents felt that the YDU needs more staffing, more support for inmates to phase out, and the goal should be to change inmate behavior long term not just during confinement.

According to one respondent, in the earlier program there was more counseling staff and tracking was a critical component. Staff members were able to make greater connections and help a lot more, but the budget cuts have affected both staffing and post YDU tracking. Multiple respondents also observed that there was no Spanish speaking teacher at Garner. The inmates were required to speak English in the classroom and often helped one another with Spanish to English translations. From a managerial position, it would be beneficial to have a bilingual teacher on staff which could reduce the possibility of an incident occurring as a result of unregulated inmate to inmate translations. This is important as 4 out of 12 participants in the program (at the time of data collection) had Spanish as their first language.

A member of the custodial staff was specifically interested in learning about the common reasons for regression between phases. It was one of the main goals of conducting this study, but the gaps in data make it difficult to address this question at this time. Nonetheless, the limited information that is available on the YDU program does reinforce the importance of external stimuli in the learning process. As noted earlier in the discussion, the participants in the YDU grew up in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods that have high

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

levels of social and physical incivilities. Through the YDU program, participants gradually develop a sense of self-esteem and the realization that it is possible to change. The respondents repeatedly stated that although they have only noted small successes, they believe that the program provides a positive direction and helps remove negative labels. Learning in squads or groups also helps in reinforcing positive attitudes. As reflected in many of the respondents' comments, they recognize the importance of fundamentally changing conditioned behaviors. They try to do this by using incentives to reward positive/expected behavior and punish (take away privileges, regress phases etc.) behavior that is undesirable. In line with social learning, the YDU program combines imitation, repetition, and reinforcement.

The current data supports the assumptions presented at the start of the study. This includes the importance of moving away from a traditional 'lock 'em up approach,' and instead, integrating elements of reform and rehabilitation through modification in cognitive and social interactions. The data show that doing well in class work or phasing up generally boosts the morale of YDU participants. It also helps them rethink their own potential as most of them are accustomed to thinking about themselves as 'failures.' Small rewards, incentives and encouragement coming from an authority figure (educational and custodial staff) helps in minimizing the impact of negative or deviant labels. The data also indicate that this process is not easy, especially in the early stages. Participants are resistant to the requirement that they let go of a dominant label that has previously defined their social status. The relinquishment of the 'gang member' label and replacement with positive choices and behaviors will be a struggle outside of the controlled environment of a correctional setting.

Concluding remarks and recommendations

By the time that this paper was being written, Phases 2 through 5 of the YDU had been moved from Garner to Corrigan Correctional Center because half of the space for the YDU was converted to expand the existing mental health unit. Currently, only Phase 1 remains at Garner as it is a small population and easily managed there. The name of the Youth Development Unit was recently changed to the Mandated Education Unit (MEU), but it is run in the same manner as the old YDU program at Garner. One of the reasons for the name change was to convey a clear emphasis on education. The name, Youth Development Unit, also gave an impression as though it was geared towards younger offenders (under 18 years old), while in reality, it was not. It should be noted that one of the two educators involved in the original YDU program at Garner has since been moved to Corrigan and has integrated well into the MEU program there.

The custodial and educational staff came across as dedicated and motivated, but somewhat constrained by limited resources. With Phases 2 through 5 having been moved to Corrigan, the school psychologist will not have enough data to test the reflection sheet that she had developed. She acknowledged that with only three participants currently in Phase 1 at Garner, any trends that she would find would be insignificant. She also added that as she has no interaction with the school psychologist at Corrigan, she does not know

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

what kind of caseload the person there might have. She herself often travels to other correctional facilities in Bridgeport and Hartford to service special education programs.

Given the small sample size and gaps in the data, it is unreasonable to draw too many broad conclusions and generalizations. Instead, it can be treated as a survey of the YDU program on which future evaluations can be conducted as MEU programs in Connecticut have the same objectives. To do so, it is imperative to identify variables of importance and keep systematic (readily available and accessible) data, update information on each participant, and analyze the data over a period of time. As currently there are only 31 present and past participants, it is relatively easy for the custodial and educational staff to recall information about positive or negative incidents related to YDU program. As the number of participants increases (in MEUs) it would be difficult to keep track of information in a manner that could facilitate identifying trends and drawing empirical generalizations. Organizing data by variables of interest will also plug gaps created due to missing or unavailable data on participants who have completed the program. The study recognizes that this task would be impacted by the available resources, including time and personnel. It would also require continuous coordination among different facilities.

The researchers asked about the feasibility of creating a central or shared database to collect data on MEU programs across the state. The database should contain information on each participant and updated as he moves through the MEU program. It can then be studied to identify patterns, common problems in particular phases, successes, etc. The members of custodial staff indicated that it would be a useful tool as they often look for data on any particular variable only when someone asks for it. Digitizing all of the available data and continuing to manage it in the future depends on the available personnel, budget, and coordination across various correctional facilities in the state.

In summation, this study is the first formal evaluation of the YDU program at Garner. As stated earlier, due to limited data and gaps in the data, it makes no claim of generalizability and should be treated as a case study. However, it does provide some useful insights about the program and the people involved, and these findings are in line with previous research on importance of education in reducing recidivism rates. Since the MEU programs in Connecticut have similar objectives and are being run in a similar manner as the YDU program, these findings could be a building block for organizing data and conducting future research.

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Appendix I SRG Member Renunciation Form

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Appendix II: Incentive Tracking Sheet

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Appendix III: Works Cited

Akers, R. L. (1985). Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

Akers, R. L. (1992). Drugs, Alcohol and Society: Social Structure, Process, and Policy, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

Arthur, B. (2009). "Managing Gangs and STGs: Proactive Approaches for Safety and Success: Managing These Various Groups Adds Additional Operational Concerns and Challenges, Not to Mention Financial Constraints, Whether These Groups Are in Our Jails, Prisons, Juvenile Facilities or on Probation." *Corrections Today,* 71 (1), p.8.

Austin, J., & McGinnis, K. (2004). Classification of High-Risk and Special Management Prisoners: A National Assessment of Current Practices. NIC Accession Number 019468.

Bandura, A. (1974). Analysis of Modeling Processes. In Psychological Modeling. Edited by A. Bandura. New York, New York: Lieber-Atherton.

Bandura, A. (1965). Influence of Models' Reinforcement Contingencies on the Acquisition of Imitative Responses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1, pp. 589-95.

Baykan, Y.N. (2008). Managing security threat groups and correctional intelligence: A case for using auditing teams as a threat management tool. *Corrections Today,* 70 (5), 50-53.

Becker, H.S. (1963). Outsiders: Studies in Sociology of Deviance. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Braithwaite, J. (1989). Crime, Shame and Reintegration. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carlson, P.M. (2001). Prison Interventions: Evolving strategies to control security threat groups. *Corrections Management Quarterly,* 50 (1), 10.

Chappell, C. A. (2004). Post-secondary correctional education and recidivism: a meta-analysis of research conducted 1990–1999. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 55(2), 148–169.

Connecticut Department of Correction, (6/7/13). Administrative Directive 6.14 Security Risk Groups. Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www. ct.gov/doc/LIB/doc/PDF/AD/ad0614.pdf

Connecticut Department of Correction, (2/1/16). Administrative Directive 9.5 Code of Penal Discipline. Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www.ct.gov/doc/LIB/doc/PDF/AD/ad0614.pdf

Connecticut Department of Correction, Family & Friends Handbook (6/26/13). Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/pdf/familyfriendshandbook.pdf

Costa, A., & Kallick, B. (2008). Learning & Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, VA.

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Davis, L., Bozick, R., Steele, J., Saunders, J. & Miles, J. (2013).Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html

Employment, wages and public safety. (2007). Justice Policy Institute. October, 2007. Retrieved on July 9, 2016, from http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/07_10_rep_employmentandpublicsafety_ac.pdf

Erisman, W. & Contardo, J. B. (2005). Learning to reduce recidivism: A 50-state analysis of postsecondary correctional education policy. Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Retrieved on July 9, 2016 from http://www.ihep.org/sites/default/files/uploads/docs/pubs/learningreducerecidivism.pdf

Esperian, J.H. (2010). The effect of prison education programs on recidivism. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 61 (4), 316-334.

Gang Management Program (2016).Connecticut Department of Correction. Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www.ct.gov/doc/cwp/view.asp?a=1492&Q=305970

Gaseau, M. (9/5/03). Connecticut Program turns Gang Members Around. Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www.corrections.com/articles/11234-connecticut-program-turns-gang-members-around

Hatcher, L.D. (2006). Security Threat Groups: It is more than managing gangs in a local facility. *Corrections Today*. 68 (2), 54-58.

Knox, G.W. (2012). The Problem of Gangs and Security Threat Groups (STG's) in American Prisons and Jails Today: Recent Findings from the 2012 NGCRC National Gang/STG Survey. National Gang Crime Research Center

Kowalski, B.R., & Martin, B. (2012). Violence and security threat group participation in Ohio prisons. *Corrections Today*, 74 (5), 80-81.

Latin Kings (n.d.) Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www.prisonoffenders.com/latin_kings.html

Los Solidos Nations. (n.d.) Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http//www.prisonoffenders.com/los_solidos.html

Maghan, J. (2000). Security Threat Groups. *Crime & Justice International*, 16 (47).

Mahoney, A.R. (1974). The Effect of Labeling upon Youths in the Juvenile Justice System: A Review of the Evidence. *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 583-614.

Matsueda, R. L. (1992). Reflected Appraisals, Parental Labeling, and Delinquency: Specifying a Symbolic Interactionist Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 6, pp. 1577-1611.

National Gang Report.(2015). National Gang Intelligence Center. Retrieved on 6/12/16 from https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/national-gang-report-2015.pdf

NETAS - La Associacion Ñetas (n.d.) Retrieved on 6/14/16 from http://www.prisonoffenders.com/netas.html

Nuttall, J., Hollmen, L., & Staley, E. (2003).The effect of earning a GED on recidivism rates. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 54 (3), 90-94.

Placido, C.d., Simon, T.L., Witte, T.D., Gu, D., & Wong, S. (2006). Treatment of gang members can reduce recidivism and institutional misconduct. *Law & Human Behavior*, 30 (1), 93-114.

Ruddell & Winterdyk (2010). Managing prison gangs: Results from a survey of U.S. prison systems. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38, 730-736.

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*

Ruffino, K., Fox, K., & Kercher, G. (2012).Gang membership and crime victimization among prison inmates. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37 (3), 321-337.
Sellers, C. S., and Winfree, L. T., Jr. (1990). Differential associations and definitions: A panel study of youthful drinking behavior. *International Journal of Addiction*. 25: 755-771.
Solomon, R. L.(1964). Punishment. *American Psychologist*, 19, pp. 239-53
Steurer, S. J., & Smith, L. G. (2003). Education reduces crime: Three-state recidivism study: Executive summary. Lanham: Correctional Education Association. Retrieved on July 8, 2016 from http://www.ceanational.org/PDFs/EdReducesCrime.pdf
Tewksbury, R., & Stengel, K. M. (2006).Assessing correctional education programs: the students' perspective. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 57 (1), pp.1–13.
Trulson, C.R., Marquart, J.W. & Kawucha, S.K. (2006).Gang suppression and Institutional Control. *Corrections Today*, 68 (2), 26-30.
Vacca, J. (2004). Educated prisoners are less likely to return to prison. *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 55, 297-305.
Vigil, D.A. (2006). Classification and security threat group management. *Corrections Today*, 68 (2), 32-34.
Wellford, C. (1975). Labeling Theory and Criminology: An Assessment. *Social Problems*, Vol. 22, pp. 332-345.
Western, B. (2006). Punishment and inequality in America. New York: Russell Sage.
Worrall, J. & Morris, R. (2012). Prison gang integration and inmate violence. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40 (5), 425-432.
Zimmerman, B. J. & F. Dialessi. (1973). Modeling Influences on Children's Creative Behavior, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 65, pp. 127-34.

About the Authors:

Divya Sharma holds a Ph.D. in Sociology, and Master's degrees in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Her research interests include informal banking systems; money laundering and terror finance; and, globalization, immigration, and ethnic identity. She has published journal articles and book chapters, and has also conducted program and policy evaluations.

Dr. Kim Marino is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Justice and Law Administration at Western Connecticut State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice from the City University of New York and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Planning and Management from Long Island University.

End Notes:

[1] As noted earlier, by the time that this paper was being written, Phases 2 to 5 of the YDU had been moved from Garner to Corrigan Correctional Center and renamed Mandated Education Unit, but it is run in the same manner as the old YDU program at Garner.

[2] The Crips are primarily an African-American gang founded in California and are considered violent adversaries of the Bloods, another primarily, though not exclusively, African American street gang from California. The Gangster Disciples are considered a highly organized street gang of mostly African American males that originated on the south side of Chicago in the 1970's. MS-13 also known as Mara Salvatrucha, is an international street gang that originated in California and is comprised of mostly Salvadorans but also Hondurans, Guatemalans, Mexicans, and other Central and South American immigrants (National Gang Report, 2015). Connecticut inmates who are affiliated with these gangs engage in the same violence and competition with rival gang members in prison as they would on the streets.

© Copyrighted by the *National Gang Crime Research Center*